T. R. Fehrenbach "This Kind of War".

One important thing was forgotten by the citizenry: by 1946 all the intellectual and sensitive types had said goodbye to the Army—they hoped for good. The new men coming in now were the kind of men who join armies the world over, blank-faced, unmolded—and they needed shaping. They got it; but it wasn't the kind of shaping they needed.

Now an N.C.O. greeted new arrivals with a smile. Where once he would have told them they made him sick to his stomach, didn't look tough enough to make a go of his outfit, he now led them meekly to his company commander. And this clean-cut young man, who once would have sat remote at the right hand of God in his orderly room, issuing orders that crackled like thunder, now smiled too. "Welcome aboard, gentlemen. I am your company commander; I'm here to help you. I'll try to make your stay both pleasant and profitable."

This was all very democratic and pleasant—but it is the nature of young men to get away with anything they can, and soon these young men found they could get away with plenty.

A soldier could tell a sergeant to blow it. In the old Army he might have been bashed, and found immediately what the rules were going to be. In the Canadian Army—which oddly enough no American liberals have found fascistic or bestial—he would have been marched in front of his company commander, had his pay reduced, perhaps even been confined for thirty days, with no damaging mark on his record. He would have learned, instantly, that orders are to be obeyed.

But in the new American Army, the sergeant reported such a case to his C.O. But the C.O. couldn't do anything drastic or educational to the man; for any real action, he had to pass the case up higher. And nobody wanted to court-martial the man, to put a permanent damaging mark on his record. The most likely outcome was for the man to be chided for being rude, and requested to do better in the future.

Some privates, behind their smirks, liked it fine.

Pretty soon, the sergeants, realizing the score, started to fraternize with the men. Perhaps, through popularity, they could get something done. The junior officers, with no sergeants to knock heads, decided that the better part of valor was never to give an unpopular order.

The new legions carried the old names, displayed the old, proud colors, with their gallant battle streamers. The regimental mottoes still said things like "Can Do." In their neat, fitted uniforms and new shiny boots—there was money for these—the troops looked good. Their appearance made the generals smile.

What they lacked couldn't be seen, not until the guns sounded.

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There is much to military training that seems childish, stultifying, and even brutal. But one essential part of breaking men into military life is the removal of misfits—and in the service a man is a misfit who cannot obey orders, any orders, and who cannot stand immense and searing mental and physical pressure.

For his own sake and for that of those around him, a man must be prepared for the awful, shrieking moment of truth when he realizes he is all alone on a hill ten thousand miles from home, and that he may be killed in the next second.

The young men of America, from whatever strata, are raised in a permissive society. The increasing alienation of their education from the harsher realities of life makes their reorientation, once enlisted, doubly important.

Prior to 1950, they got no reorientation. They put on the uniform, but continued to get by, doing things rather more or less. They had no time for sergeants.

As discipline deteriorated, the generals themselves were hardly affected. They still had their position, their pomp and ceremonies. Surrounded by professionals of the old school, largely field rank, they still thought their rod was iron, for, seemingly, their own orders were obeyed.

But ground battle is a series of platoon actions. No longer can a field commander stand on a hill, like Lee or Grant, and oversee his formations. Orders in combat—the orders that kill men or get them killed, are not given by generals, or even by majors. They are given by lieutenants and sergeants, and sometimes by PFC's.

When a sergeant gives a soldier an order in battle, it must have the same weight as that of a four-star general.

Such orders cannot be given by men who are some of the boys. Men willingly take orders to die only from those they are trained to regard as superior beings.

It was not until the summer of 1950, when the legions went forth, that the generals realized what they had agreed to, and what they had wrought.

The Old Army, outcast and alien and remote from the warm bosom of society, officer and man alike, ordered into Korea, would have gone without questioning. It would have died without counting. As on Bataan, it would not have listened for the angel's trumpet or the clarion call. It would have heard the hard sound of its own bugles, and hard-bitten, cynical, wise in bitter ways, it would have kept its eyes on its sergeants.

It would have died. It would have retreated, or surrendered, only in the last extremity. In the enemy prison camps, exhausted, sick, it would have spat upon its captors, despising them to the last.

It would have died, but it might have held.

One aftermath of the Korean War has been the passionate attempt in some military quarters to prove the softness and decadence of American society as a whole, because in the first six months of that war there were wholesale failures. It has been a pervasive and persuasive argument, and it has raised its own counterargument, equally passionate.

The trouble is, different men live by different myths.

There are men who would have a society pointed wholly to fighting and resistance to Communism, and this would be a very different society from the one Americans now enjoy. It might succeed on the battlefield, but its other failures can be predicted.

But the infantry battlefield also cannot be remade to the order of the prevailing midcentury opinion of American sociologists.

The recommendations of the so-called Doolittle Board of 1945–1946, which destroyed so much of the will—if not the actual power—of the military traditionalists, and left them bitter, and confused as to how to act, was based on experience in World War II. In that war, as in all others, millions of civilians were fitted arbitrarily into a military pattern already centuries old. It had once fitted Western society; it now coincided with American customs and thinking no longer.

What the Doolittle Board tried to do, in small measure, was to bring the professional Army back into the new society. What it could not do, in 1946, was to gauge the future.

By 1947 the United States Army had returned, in large measure, to the pattern it had known prior to 1939. The new teen-agers who now joined it were much the same stripe of men who had joined in the old days. They were not intellectuals, they were not completely fired with patriotism, or motivated by the draft; nor was an aroused public, eager to win a war, breathing down their necks.

A great many of them signed up for three squares and a sack.

Over several thousand years of history, man has found a way to make soldiers out of this kind of man, as he comes, basically unformed, to the colors. It is a way with great stresses and great strains. It cannot be said it is wholly good. Regimentation is not good, completely, for any man.

But no successful army has been able to avoid it. It is an unpleasant necessity, seemingly likely to go on forever, as long as men fight in fields and mud.

One thing should be made clear.

The Army could have fought World War III, just as it could have fought World War II, under the new rules. During 1941–1945 the average age of the United States soldier was in the late twenties, and the ranks were seasoned with maturity from every rank of life, as well as intelligence.

In World War III, or any war with national emotional support, this would have again been true. Soldiers would have brought their motivation with them, firmed by understanding and maturity.

The Army could have fought World War III in 1950, but it could not fight Korea.

As a case in point, take the experiences of one platoon sergeant in Fort Lewis, Washington. During the big war he had held sway over a platoon of seventy-two enlisted men. The platoon was his to run; the officers rarely came around the barracks.

The platoon sergeant was a reasonable man, in charge of reasonable men, who knew why they were in the Army. Their average age was thirty-two; one-

fourth of them, roughly, were college trained. Almost all of them were skilled, in one trade or another.

This kind of man cannot be made to dig a six-by-six hole to bury a carelessly dropped cigarette, nor double-timed around the PX on Sunday morning.

The platoon sergeant relieved a multiple-striped young idiot—as he termed the man—who tried just this. The platoon, as platoons can, ruined the former sergeant.

The new platoon sergeant told his men the barracks needed cleaning, but if everyone would cooperate, each man clean his own area each day, he could get a few men off detail to clean the common areas, such as the latrine, and there need be no GI parties.

The platoon cooperated. There were no GI parties, no extra details. A few men went off the track, now and then; the older men of the platoon handled them quietly, without bothering the platoon sergeant.

This was discipline. Ideally, it should well up out of men, not be imposed upon them.

The platoon prospered. It won the battalion plaque for best barracks so often it was allowed to keep the plaque in perpetuity.

Even after VJ-Day, every man fell out for reveille, promptly, because the platoon sergeant explained to them this was the way the game was played. And the platoon was proud of itself; every man knew it was a good outfit, just a little better than the next.

Then, one by one, the men went home, as the war ended.

The platoon sergeant now was promoted to first sergeant, six stripes, an enlisted god who walked. He got a new company of several platoons, all filled with the new, callow faces entering the Army to be trained.

The war was over, and every man coming in knew it.

The first sergeant, wise now in the ways of handling men, as he thought, carefully explained to the newcomers that the barracks must be cleaned, but if everyone would cooperate, each man clean his own area each day, there would be no GI parties, and there would be passes.

On Saturday the barracks were dirty.

The sergeant, who thought that men needed only to understand what was required to obey, carefully explained what he wanted. Friday, with a great deal of hollering, shouting, and horseplay, the new men cleaned the barracks.

On Saturday, the barracks were still dirty, and the captain made a few pointed remarks to the sergeant.

The sergeant got everyone together, and told them how it was going to be. These men on the mops, these men on the brooms, these men with the lye soap. No hollering or sloshing of water or horseplay—just clean the goddam barracks.

It took most of Friday night, and the men had to stay in the latrines to clean their rifles, but they cleaned the barracks. A few of them got out of hand, but there were no older hands who could—or would—hold them in check. The sergeant handled each of these himself.

The platoon prospered, but it wasn't easy, particularly on the sergeant. Gradually, he came to realize that seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds, mostly from the disadvantaged areas of society, had no feeling of responsibility to the Army or to the Republic for which it stood. They were not self-disciplined, and they tended to resent authority, even more than the college men and skilled artisans he had commanded before. Probably some had resented their parents; definitely most resented the sergeant, even as most of them, back in their home towns, had instinctively resented the police.

There is no getting around the fact that cops and sergeants spoil your fun.

The platoon prospered, as a sort of jail, until someone wrote to his congressman. After that the captain spoke to the sergeant, telling him that it was peacetime and that perhaps the real purpose of an Army was not to learn to use the bayonet, but to engage in athletics and take Wednesday afternoons off.

The sergeant, now a confused young man with six stripes who walked, left the Army, and graduated from college. If the Army was going to hell, it was a lot more pleasant to watch it go to hell from the Officer's Club than from the Orderly Room.

A decade after Korea, the military traditionalists still grind their teeth. The sociologists still keep a wary eye on them. Both still try to use the Korean battleground, and its dreary POW camps, to further their own particular myths of human behavior.

Probably, both are wrong.

KOREA

The military have the prepondence of fact with them as far as Korea was concerned. Korea was the kind of war that since the dawn of history was fought by professionals, by legions. It was fought by men who soon knew they had small support or sympathy at home, who could read in the papers statements by prominent men that they should be withdrawn. It was fought by men whom the Army—at its own peril—had given neither training nor indoctrination, nor the hardness and bitter pride men must have to fight a war in which they do not in their hearts believe.

The Army needed legions, but society didn't want them. It wanted citizen-soldiers.

But the sociologists are right—absolutely right—in demanding that the centurion view of life not be imposed upon America. In a holy, patriotic war—like that fought by the French in 1793, or as a general war against Communism will be—America can get a lot more mileage out of citizen-soldiers than it can from legions.

No one has suggested that perhaps there should be two sets of rules, one for the professional Army, which may have to fight in far places, without the declaration of war, and without intrinsic belief in the value of its dying, for reasons of policy, chessmen on the checkerboard of diplomacy; and one for the high-minded, enthusiastic, and idealistic young men who come aboard only when the ship is sinking.

The other answer is to give up Korea-type wars, and to surrender great-power status, and a resultant hope of order—our own decent order—in the world. But America is rich and fat and very, very noticeable in this world.

It is a forlorn hope that we should be left alone.

In the first six months America suffered a near debacle because her Regular Army fighting men were the stuff of legions, but they had not been made into legionaries.

America was not more soft or more decadent than it had been twenty years earlier. It was confused, badly, on its attitudes toward war. It was still bringing up its youth to think there were no tigers, and it was still reluctant to forge them guns to shoot tigers.

Many of America's youth, in the Army, faced horror badly because they had never been told they would have to face horror, or that horror is very normal in our unsane world. It had not been ground into them that they would have to obey their officers, even if the orders got them killed.

It has been a long, long time since American citizens have been able to take down the musket from the mantelpiece and go tiger hunting. But they still cling to the belief that they can do so, and do it well, without training.

This is the error that leads some men to cry out that Americans are decadent.

If Americans in 1950 were decadent, so were the rabble who streamed miserably into Valley Forge, where von Steuben made soldiers out of them. If American society had no will to defend itself, neither did it in 1861, at First Manassas, or later at Shiloh, when whole regiments of Americans turned tail and ran.

The men who lay warm and happy in their blankets at Kasserine, as the panzers rolled toward them in the dawn, were decadent, by this reasoning.

The problem is not that Americans are soft but that they simply will not face what war is all about until they have had their teeth kicked in. They will not face the fact that the military professionals, while some have ideas about society in general that are distorted and must be watched, still know better than anyone else how a war is won.

Free society cannot be oriented toward the battlefield—Sparta knew that trap—but some adjustments must be made, as the squabbling Athenians learned to their sorrow.

The sociologists and psychologists of Vienna had no answer to the Nazi bayonets, when they crashed against their doors. The soldiers of the democratic world did.

More than once, as at Valley Forge, after Bull Run, and Kasserine, the world has seen an American army rise from its own ashes, reorient itself, grow hard and bitter, knowledgeable and disciplined and tough.

In 1951, after six months of being battered, the Eighth Army in Korea rose from its own ashes of despair. No man who was there still believes Americans in the main are decadent, just as no man who saw Lieutenant General Matt Ridgway in operation doubts the sometime greatness of men.